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### I. Scope


This policy shall apply to all lands managed by the Land Stewardship Program including property acquired with Save Our Rivers, Preservation 2000 or mitigation funding. Nothing in this policy shall negate any statute, administrative rule, or other policy requirement. This policy may be reviewed and approved by the District Governing Board at five (5) year intervals or earlier, and updated as required. Public comment may be solicited as part of the review process.

### II. Purpose

This policy establishes a commitment to the responsible management of District lands in a manner consistent with legislative directives and the District's mission.

In 1981, the Florida Legislature established the "Save Our Rivers" program ("SOR") for the five water management districts to acquire water resource lands. This legislation (373.59 F.S.) produced the Water Management Lands Trust Fund empowering the water management districts to acquire lands needed to protect, manage, and conserve the state's water resources. Preservation 2000 ("P2000"), enacted by the Legislature in 1990, also added land acquisition funds to the Save Our Rivers program. The 1999 Florida Forever Act consolidated the legislative directives of SOR/P2000 and expanded the funding to take over when P2000 terminates. The 1999 legislation authorized funds to be appropriated for acquisition, management, maintenance and capital improvements including perimeter fencing, signs, control of invasive exotic species, controlled burning, habitat inventory and restoration, law enforcement, access roads and trails, and minimum public accommodations.

Land acquired by the District's Save Our Rivers program and managed by the Land Stewardship program must satisfy several requirements set forth in Sections 373.139 and 373.1391, F.S. Section 373.139, F.S., declares it necessary for the public health and welfare that water and water-related

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resources be conserved and protected. The acquisition of real property for this objective shall constitute a public purpose for which public funds may be budgeted.

Section 373.1391(1)(a), F.S., states that lands titled to the water management districts shall be managed and maintained to the extent practicable, to ensure a balance between public access, general public recreational purposes, and restoration and protection of their natural state and condition.

Section 373.1391(1)(b), F.S., states that, whenever practicable, such lands shall be open to the general public for recreational uses. General public recreational uses shall include, but not be limited to, fishing, hunting, horseback riding, swimming, camping, hiking, canoeing, boating, diving, birding, sailing, jogging, and other related outdoor activities to the maximum extent possible considering the environmental sensitivity and suitability of those lands.


Section 373.1391(1)(d), F.S., states that the District shall first consider using soil and water conservation districts to administer agricultural leases.

Section 373.1391(3), F.S., encourages each district to use volunteers to provide land management and other services.

Section 373.1391(4), F.S., encourages each district to enter into cooperative land management agreements with state agencies or local governments to provide the coordinated and cost-effective management of lands.

Section 373.1391(5), F.S., authorizes water resource and supply projects, storm water management projects, linear facilities, and sustainable agriculture and forestry where it is compatible with the natural resource values and the public interest, is consistent with the project management plan, the proposed use is appropriately located on the property and other lands have been considered, and the titleholder of the property has been properly compensated.

Section 373.591, F.S., mandates the District to solicit input on current management programs through professional peer reviews.

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### III. Statement of Policy

The Land Stewardship Program mission is to provide natural resource protection and management while allowing compatible multiple uses on designated public lands. The Mission Statement together with requirements set forth in the Florida Statutes, provide three primary goals for the District Land Stewardship Program, each of which is linked to section(s) in this Land Stewardship Policy document:


- 1) Conservation and protection of water resources
  - *Water Resource Protection (Section 05.00111);*
- 2) Protection and/or restoration of land to its natural state and condition
  - *Restoration and Protection of Natural Communities (Section 05.00112), and*
  - *Resource Operations and Maintenance (Section 05.00113);*
- 3) Provide public use
  - *Public Use and Environmental Education (Section 05.00114).*

### IV. Definitions

Archaeological/Historic Resources	Any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, object, or property of historic, architectural, or archaeological value relating to the history, government, and culture of an historic or pre-historic people.
Best Management Practice (BMP)	The best available technology or process that is practical and achieves the desired goal or objective.
Capital Improvement	Activities relating to the restoration, public access, recreational uses and necessary services for land and water areas including the initial removal of invasive plants; and the construction, improvement, enlargement or extension of facilities' signs, fire lines, access roads, and trails. Such activities shall be identified prior to the acquisition of a parcel or the approval of a project.
Cooperating Agencies	Two or more agencies working together to operate a specific management area.

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Cooperative Management Agreement	An agreement between two or more agencies outlining the respective duties and responsibilities of each agency in the management of a specific tract of land.
Critical Habitat	Areas designated for the survival and recovery of state/federally listed rare, threatened, endangered or other sensitive species.
Desirable Vegetation	Native plant species that are appropriate for a specific community type and provide benefits to wildlife in the form of food, cover and nesting.
Invasive/Exotic Vegetation	Certain plants, that displace native species and adversely affect wildlife habitat, water quality, recreation, and biological diversity.
Habitat Diversity	Richness and variety of native plant communities within a particular area of the landscape
Hydroperiod	Flooding duration, depth, and timing that influences species composition, ecosystem structure and function.
Interim Land Management	Management of non-natural areas that provides revenue without impacting long-term water-development projects.
Lead Manager	The prime managing entity designated for a given tract of land; generally provides the on-site staff.
Management Area	A single tract or combination of tracts under one management program.
Mitigation	For purposes of this policy, the actual acquisition, restoration, creation, or enhancement of wetlands to compensate for permitted wetland impacts.
Mitigation Banking	Wetland acquisition, restoration, creation or enhancement undertaken expressly to provide compensation in advance of wetland losses from development activities.

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Multiple-Use	The management of renewable resources for a variety of purposes such as recreation, range, timber, wildlife habitat, and water resource development.
Prescribed Fire	Burning of vegetative fuels using controlled application of fire within specified environmental conditions.
Primary Resource Lands	Lands having high water resource, fish, wildlife, and recreational values requiring acquisition or protection.
Regional Mitigation Area	For purposes of this policy, permitted wetland impacts offset through payment for the acquisition, restoration and perpetual management of a Save Our Rivers identified and duly noticed project.
Responsible Management	Level of management described in the General Management Plan.
Sustainable Use	To provide continued use of a natural resource without degradation or loss of that resource.
Water Resource Buffer	Portion of a Preservation 2000 or Save Our Rivers project necessary to protect the aquatic environment.
Wildlife Corridor	A connection between natural areas that allows the safe movement of wildlife.

## V. References

### *Water Resource Protection*

The basis for the Land Stewardship Program is the protection and management of natural hydrologic resources. The following policies guide implementation of this objective:

1. Acquired lands shall be managed to provide water resource related benefits.

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2. Land uses or activities that significantly or permanently alter or degrade the quality, quantity and/or natural movement of ground or surface water are not allowed unless a part of a regional water management system.
3. Where feasible, an attempt shall be made to restore a more natural hydroperiod on tracts where the drainage patterns have been altered.
4. Public use shall not result in detrimental impacts to water resources. When a public use activity produces detrimental effects on water resources, it shall be discontinued until an evaluation determines that such use is compatible.
5. Water resource lands designated as necessary to implement the Central and Southern Florida "Restudy" project, shall upon acquisition become the responsibility of the (Interim) Land Management program, and follow the guidelines set forth under Section 373.1391(5), F.S. and HB 1119.

*Restoration and Protection of Natural Communities*


1. The Land Stewardship Program will encourage the acquisition of large or regionally significant areas that protect important natural resources and provide wildlife corridors.
2. Particular emphasis shall be placed on the identification, protection and management of rare, threatened and endangered species.
3. The planting of invasive exotic plant species shall be prohibited in all management areas. Management practices will strive to identify existing infestations and implement appropriate control or eradication measures.
4. Where practicable, an attempt shall be made to restore and maintain desirable vegetation to promote habitat diversity in areas where invasive exotic vegetation, grazing practices, or improved land uses have substantially altered the historic landscape.

*Resource Operations and Maintenance*

1. Lands acquired for natural and/or hydrologic resource benefits shall be managed to conserve and protect those resources.

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2. Exotic plant control in all management areas shall strive to attain a level of success where periodic maintenance eliminates the infestation or reduces the coverage of exotic plants.
3. Prescribed fire will be a primary management tool on District lands and will be applied within fire-maintained communities at appropriate intervals.
4. The Division of Forestry will be notified of all wildfires on District lands. Land Stewardship will provide initial suppression when commensurate personnel and equipment are available.
5. Inventories of natural and historic resources shall be performed to provide information for effective land management planning, natural community maintenance and ecological restoration.
6. Evaluation and monitoring of management activities shall be conducted to improve program effectiveness and efficiency.
  - a. Research shall evaluate the environmental response of certain management activities to assist staff in making appropriate management decisions.
  - b. Monitoring shall be conducted to identify landscape changes resulting from management activities.
  - c. Legislative-mandated management reviews will provide input from professional peers
7. Resource protection shall be provided by professional law enforcement services through funded and unfunded contractual agreements, to safeguard the public and protect natural and cultural resources on District-managed natural areas.
8. Sustainable use of forest resources shall be conducted where these activities adhere to a series of environmental criteria (see 1999 Forest Management Plan) that meet Land Stewardship Program goals. Timber contractors will be required to meet silvicultural best management practices (BMP) developed for Florida forests.


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9. Range management (grazing) will be considered on improved or native ranges when the introduction of cattle will not conflict with other natural resource management and public use goals.
10. Archaeological and historic resources are protected by site identification and inter-agency coordination with the Florida Division of Historical Resources. Land stewardship planning shall include an analysis of archeological data accompanied by appropriate public education opportunities.
11. Infrastructure support shall be developed and maintained to provide safe access for responsible management and public use on District lands. Such infrastructure may include access points, roads, trails, signs, utilities, and minimal public facilities.
12. Mechanical equipment may be used in conjunction with prescribed burning and other management tools to control vegetation and restore habitat structure.
13. Agricultural developments previously existing on acquired natural areas may be maintained if management of these developments is consistent with other land stewardship goals.

*Public Use and Environmental Education*

1. Public use of management areas that is consistent with other management goals shall be encouraged. Public use that may have detrimental impacts on sensitive environmental resources shall be restricted until an evaluation determines such use is compatible. A public use compatibility assessment will be included in the General Management Plan completed for each management area and will be based on the following criteria:
  - a. Consistency with the reason the lands were acquired.
  - b. Restrictions and/or prohibitions imposed by easements, leases, reservations, adjacent land ownership, conditions of the purchase agreement, and any other agreements concerning the property.
  - c. Infrastructure and support facility requirements, such as fences, gates, signage, entry design, stabilized off-road parking, trails, campsites, maintenance, and other operational and budgetary impacts.
  - d. Opportunities for persons with disabilities.



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- e. Limitations resulting from endangered species, other sensitive natural resources, archaeological resources, or land management practices.
- f. Public health, safety and welfare.
- g. Environmental education program opportunities.


## 2. Public Use Regulation

- a. Public Use Regulations are set forth in 40E-7.511, F.A.C., to implement Section 373.1391(1)(b), F.S. Accordingly, the District shall publish and make available to the public a “Public Use Guide” for designated Land Management Areas. The Public Use Guide will be adopted by the Governing Board at a public meeting advertised in accordance with Chapter 120, F.S.
- b. Rules and regulations governing the public use of each management area shall be enforced by agencies with appropriate law enforcement jurisdiction.
- c. Pursuant to Section 373.609, F.S., the District shall seek the cooperation of every state and county attorney, sheriff, police officer, and the appropriate city and county official in the enforcement of the provisions set forth according to 40E-7.511, F.A.C.
- d. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regulations shall govern hunting in areas opened for such use.

### *Implementation Strategies*

The District will secure dedicated funding sources, personnel and other resources to support program goals and objectives. Project funding needs and sources for cooperative management agreements with government and non-government entities will be identified during acquisition. A cooperative management agreement will designate a lead manager and identify whether District funding is required.

- 1. The private sector may be solicited to furnish certain management-related facilities and services through the execution of leases and agreements. These leases/agreements will assure mutual benefits to both the District and private parties and be consistent with the program management objectives.

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## 2. Mitigation


- a. Mitigation Banking - Mitigation banking provides an opportunity to accomplish large-scale restoration that may otherwise go unfunded. Pursuant to Section 373.4135 F.S. the District is encouraged to develop mitigation banks. Land managers will evaluate opportunities in their regions to implement mitigation banks that are consistent with the guidelines established in the Joint State and Federal Mitigation Bank Review Team Process for Florida.
- b. Regional Mitigation Areas - The acquisition, restoration and management of District lands as mitigation shall be consistent with Chapter 2000-133 amending sections 373.414 and 373.4135, F.S. This includes the establishment of Memorandums of Agreement ("MOA") that include restoration plans, success criteria, and monitoring requirements. The MOA's will be used to implement mitigation using full-cost accounting, public noticing, and approval by the Governing Board for use as a mitigation area. The mitigation shall meet restoration objectives as provided in the General Management Plan.

## 3. Revenue Generation

- a. Private concessions and/or agreements with non-profit organizations will be considered to implement needed services through concession contracts.
- b. Entrance and user fees, permits, licenses and/or advance reservations may be required where considered necessary by the managing agency.
- c. Timber sales will be conducted to improve forest health or to support specific forest management goals.
- d. Grazing leases will be encouraged on selected rangeland to generate revenue or to provide services that offset program management costs.

## 4. Volunteers and Interns

- a. Volunteers, interns and alternative work forces will be used when possible to supplement existing staff and services.
- b. Any volunteer services must meet the standards and procedures prescribed by the District (Risk Management Manual Vol. 1.)

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### *Program Components*

1. Management Assessment - a brief summary of the management issues completed when the site is identified for acquisition.
2. General Management Plan (GMP) - provides a description of recommended management and is required for each Land Stewardship Management Area. The GMP follows a designated format and is updated every five years.
3. Activity Plan (AP) – provides a detailed implementation strategy for specific activities such as prescribed burning, exotic removal and restoration. The plan shall be developed by the lead manager in consultation with the cooperating agencies for each major tract of land (or group of tracts) to be operated as a single management unit. The AP may be included in the GMP and are updated when necessary.
4. Annual Work Plan (AWP) – summarizes activities corresponding with annual budget development and is prepared by the Operations Section of the Land Stewardship Program.
5. Reporting - summaries of management activities for each management area will be reported quarterly within the District and annually as part of the Florida Forever Work Plan.